

Survey gauges Macomb County business climate

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By Chad Selweski, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The largest survey of the Macomb County business community in history is under way, with officials and educators hoping to gain insights into the needs and concerns of local employers.

The electronic poll is a follow-up to a similar business-climate survey conducted in December as a joint project of Oakland University, the Macomb County chambers and the county Planning and Economic Development Department.

Some 500 employers responded by e-mail to the first survey, and participation is expected to exceed that number this time, according to Al Lorenzo, executive in residence for OU.

The current survey will place an emphasis on health care reform and certain sectors of the economy that could boost local small manufacturers and companies.

Business leaders say that several improvements have been made to the survey based on feedback from the first round.

This time, the special focus is on emerging sectors, such as clean energy, defense contracts and advanced manufacturing, which could present new business opportunities and revitalize Macomb's economic base.

The December survey found a growing sense of optimism in the business community and a perceived end to the doldrums of 2009. A majority of businesses expected an increase in sales, stabilized pay for workers and a steady workforce by mid-2010. About 40 percent of employers anticipated an improvement in their financial "bottom line" over the ensuing six months.

However, respondents indicated that the improving business conditions may not result in employment gains for the county's jobless workers. Only 20 percent said they expect to hire more workers and one in five companies responding predicted the need for more worker concessions on fringe benefits.

The current survey, which takes about 10 minutes to complete and allows respondents to remain anonymous, can be found online at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Business_Climate_Survey. Participants must respond before June 21.

The final report will be released by Aug. 1 and will be shared with local community leaders and elected officials.

The county, OU and the chambers hope to routinely conduct surveys every six months as a baseline to measure progress toward improving the business climate in Macomb County and to assist in identifying opportunities for economic development.

For more information about the survey, call (586) 469-5285.